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ABSTRACT

By focusing on what and how students want to learn, shared inquiry between teachers and students is inherently motivating, supporting students' intrinsic motivation. When students themselves participate as educational theorists, learning experiences become more engaging for both students and teachers. The yearlong inquiry described in this paper highlights the self-selected reading portion of a balanced language arts curriculum. Teachers and students are encouraged to use the example discussed in the paper as a way to step into shared inquiry of their own choosing in which they explore the meanings, purposes, and outcomes of their literacy curricula. Contains 36 references and 9 figures presenting excerpts from students' journals. A student questionnaire is attached. (Author/RS)

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Enhancing Student and Teacher Engagement in Literacy Learning: A Shared Inquiry Approach

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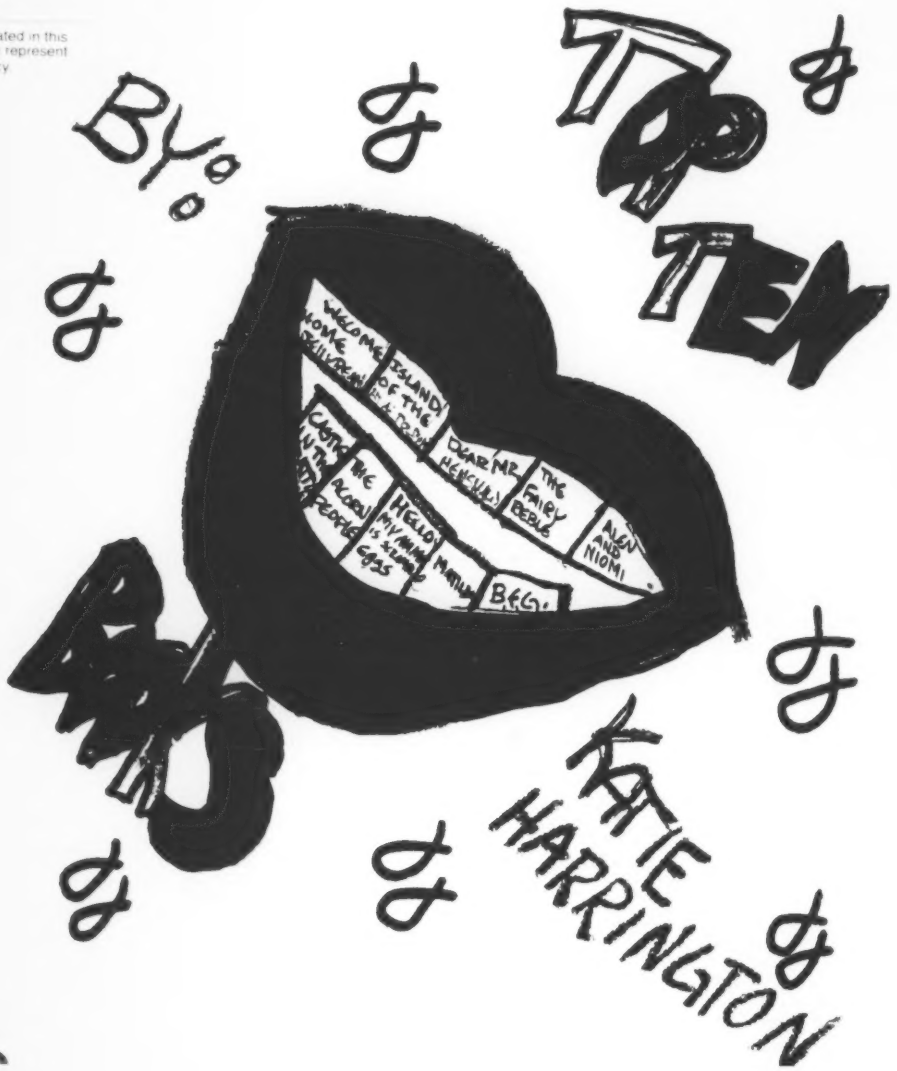

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Instructional Resource No. 17
Winter 1996

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Enhancing Student and Teacher Engagement in Literacy Learning: A Shared Inquiry Approach

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University of Georgia

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE NO. 17
Winter 1996

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Penny Oldfather is Assistant Professor in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Georgia. She has sixteen years of public school experience in teaching and administration. She received a B.A. from Oberlin College, an M.A. from the University of South Dakota, and her Ph.D. from The Claremont Graduate School, where she received Phi Delta Kappan Peter Lincoln Spencer Dissertation Award in 1991. She is a principal investigator with the National Reading Research Center. Her research focuses on student motivation and social constructionism in teaching and learning, with particular interest in qualitative research processes that explore students' perspectives. She has published in such journals as *Educational Researcher*, *Journal of Reading Behavior*, *Research in Middle Level Education*, and *Language Arts*.

Enhancing Student and Teacher Engagement in Literacy Learning: A Shared Inquiry Approach

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The Claremont Graduate School

Penny Oldfather
University of Georgia

National Reading Research Center
Universities of Georgia and Maryland
Instructional Resource No. 17
Winter 1996

Abstract. *By focusing on what and how students want to learn, shared inquiry between teachers and students is inherently motivating, supporting students' intrinsic motivation. When students themselves participate as educational theorists, learning experiences become more engaging for both students and teachers. The yearlong inquiry described here highlights the self-selected reading portion of a balanced language arts curriculum. We encourage teachers and students to use this example as a way to step into shared inquiries of their own choosing in which they explore the meanings, purposes, and outcomes of their literacy curricula.*

Dear Mrs. Thomas,

I've [reached] my goal this week by reading a lot of Bradbury short stories. I think he's an excellent writer, and I thank you for taking me to the Bookworm [Bookstore] to have him sign my books. Some of my favorite stories by him are The Small Assassin, The Pedestrian, the Fog Horn, and many more. I really like the Ray Bradbury unit we did. It's better than doing a reading log on a certain book like we've done before because the stories are quite different from each other. Bradbury is one of my favorite authors.

And you might want to read some of his stories in front of the class 'cause most of the class likes him.

Brian

Brian,

Thanks for letting me know when you like units or activities. It helps me plan better. I agree. I think 90% of the class loved Bradbury. Won't he be glad to get our essays?

What will you try next? Do you like Bradbury or Tolkien best? Is that a fair question? I couldn't answer it myself.

Also, you are doing a great job of keeping up [with your goals] lately. Does it feel better?

Sally

This exchange between Brian and Sally was part of the shared inquiry into literacy learning that took place in Sally Thomas's classroom of 10- and 11-year-olds at Willow School (a pseudonym), situated in a small community in Southern California. The journals reflect the free exchange that took place between teacher and students about books, personal reading purposes, and pedagogy in their whole language classroom. Participation in interactive journals was just one of several strategies used by Sally and her students as they joined in this shared inquiry. They found these experiences to be deeply motivating (Oldfather, 1993a; Oldfather & McLaughlin, 1993).

In this instructional resource we[1] describe how teachers and students can move toward creating literacy learning experiences that are engaging for *both* teachers and students. We present an approach that encourages teachers and students to step into a shared inquiry of their own choosing in which they explore the meanings, purposes, and outcomes of their literacy curriculum.

For example, both students and teachers may grapple with the issue of which books count most for whom. What does it mean to the teacher when a student picks books from predictable series like *The Babysitters Club* or *Sweet Valley Twins*? What does that choice mean to the student? What are the implications of having choice in the first place? In another example, teachers and students may think about the differences in shared and self-selected reading experiences. There may be value for students in discovering that they can enjoy and learn from a book they would not have chosen for themselves. There may be value for a teacher in discovering that a student whom s/he had judged as less than able chose to immerse her/himself in *National Geographic* magazines because of an avid interest in archaeology. We believe this inquiry process has potential to transform classrooms.

Our approach rests on the belief that intrinsic motivation is inherently bound up with the learning process. Rather than viewing

[1]We both are teachers, teacher-researchers, and university researchers. Our common interest across 5 years has been our collaboration with a group of students beginning in Sally's classroom in 1989. Sally was engaged in practical shared inquiry, as described in this article, with her class at the same time that she was working on her doctoral program. Penny conducted her dissertation research in Sally's classroom, collaborating with the students as co-researchers on their motivation for learning (Oldfather, 1991). Our work has continued, separately at times and together, taking several forms. The students, now in high school, are conducting their own research on motivation, and we continue as their partners (Oldfather, 1993b, 1994).

motivation as something that teachers do to students, we believe that motivation flows out of children's natural curiosities and social inclinations as well as their yearnings for self-determination. We seek to promote students' *continuing impulse to learn* (CIL). This form of motivation is

> an on-going engagement in learning that is propelled and focused by thought and feeling emerging from the learners' processes of constructing meaning. CIL is characterized by intense involvement, curiosity, and a search for understanding as learners experience learning as a deeply personal and continuing agenda. (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994, p. 142)

Students who experience this quality of motivation in classroom literacy feel no separation between who they are and what they do in school. By focusing on what and how students want to learn, shared inquiry is inherently motivating, naturally supporting the continuing impulse to learn (Oldfather & McLaughlin, 1993).

Principles of Shared Inquiry

The inquiry processes we describe build on two new directions in classroom research. First, the starting point is with students and *their* understandings rather than teaching methodology. Second, the students are not the objects of study. They are instead partners-in-inquiry.

Shared inquiry requires a shift of focus from *teaching and method* to a focus on *student and teacher learning*. We hasten to say that teaching and method continue to be important, but they flow in the most meaningful and responsive ways when participants' first focus is on learning rather than on the method itself. This may appear to be a small and unimportant difference. However, we argue that such a shift makes visible and accessible the intertwining of motivation and literacy learning as enacted in classroom life (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994; Thomas, 1993).

Although learning cannot be directly "seen" (Weade, 1992), a number of researchers are exploring ways to understand learning from the child's point of view (Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993; Short & Pierce, 1990; Taylor, 1993). Vivian Paley's work (1989, 1990) exemplifies how sensitive attention to students' perspectives has potential to precipitate basic changes in the ways that a teacher conceptualizes teaching and learning.

> The act of teaching became a daily search for the child's point of view accompanied by the sometimes unwelcome disclosure of my hidden attitudes. The search was what mattered—only later did someone tell me it was research—and it provided an open-ended script from which to observe, interpret, and integrate the living drama of the classroom. (Paley, 1989, p. 7)

The shared inquiry requires another important shift, this time in terms of relationships. The teacher shares the control and responsibility for shaping the teaching/learning process with students by inviting them to take active roles in the inquiry. The students know s/he needs and trusts them to think about and articu-

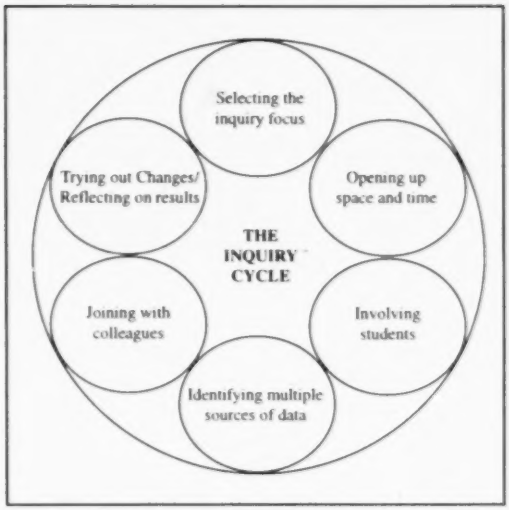
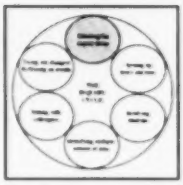

Selecting the inquiry focus
Opening up space and time
Involving students
Identifying multiple sources of data
Joining with colleagues
Trying out Changes/ Reflecting on results
THE INQUIRY CYCLE

Figure 1. The Inquiry Cycle

late their growing understandings. The students also take active roles in planning and implementing classroom experiences. The shared inquiry cycle is summarized in Figure 1.

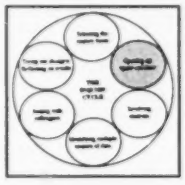
The Inquiry Cycle

Shared inquiry with students may be viewed as a cycle of exploration. It is important to remember that this cycle is recursive rather than sequential. Student involvement in the inquiry occurs constantly and can raise new issues for further inquiry and reflection at any time. Nicki raised just such an issue with her comment in her reading log (see Figure 7). In another example, reflection, both teacher and student, resulted in an expanding of goals to include a wider range of reading. The elements are summarized below.



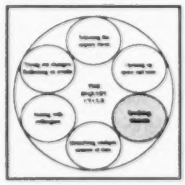
Selecting the Inquiry Focus

The example in this article focuses on reading workshop and was raised by the teacher. Inquiry issues may as easily be raised by students. Many other areas of the literacy curriculum could be explored. For example, a teacher and students may wish to explore whole-class shared reading, reading for investigations in science or social studies, or literature discussion groups. Self-selected or directed writing experiences could also be explored.



Opening up Space and Time

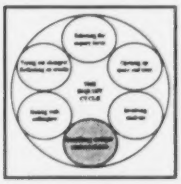
Shared inquiry requires a commitment to open up both literally and metaphorically the necessary time and space to try things out, to play with variations, to probe the possibilities for enhancing motivation and learning, and to take risks in entering new territory.



Involving Students

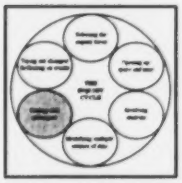
Students are valued participants from the beginning. Their explicit involvement through

dialogue, both oral and written, provides information that the teacher cannot access alone. Possibly even more important is the inherent value to students in thinking about how they learn best and having some say in shaping their own learning.



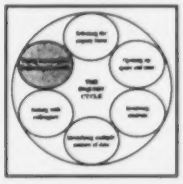
Identifying Multiple Sources of Data

Data sources for the inquiry need to be diverse. Anecdotal evidence is available from whole-class and individual discussions with students. Open-ended, written dialogue in the form of interactive reading journals provides concrete evidence of students' thinking, understandings, problems, and questions. Records of books read by students provide both qualitative and quantitative data. Questionnaires can elicit more focused information.



Joining with Colleagues

Joining with colleagues is of immense value in initiating new projects. Colleagues can share ideas and provide support in what may sometimes feel like a risky venture (Thomas, 1994). More distant collaboration is available through reading how others focused on children's learning from the children's point of view, for example, *White Teacher* (Paley, 1989), *Multiple Worlds of Child Writers: Friends Learning to Write* (Dyson, 1989), *Children's Voices* (Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993), *Engaging Children* (Allen, Shockley, & Michaelove, 1993), *Education as Adventure: Lessons from the Second Grade* (Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993), and *From the Child's Point of View* (Taylor, 1993).

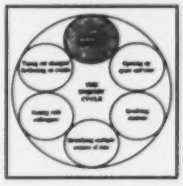


Trying Out Changes, Reflecting on Results

A series of changes, perhaps large, perhaps small, can be initiated based on the new insights gained with the help of the children. Changes in one part of the day may seep over into other parts of the curriculum, which may be reconsidered and reshaped as well. This is an on-going, recursive process that requires time: time for revisiting and reflection, time for settling in, and time for the new rhythms to become more comfortable for teachers and students.

An Example of Shared Inquiry

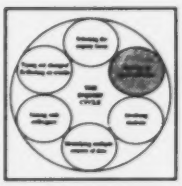
Getting Started: Questioning Self-Selected Reading Time



In the fall of 1989, I (Sally) was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the "silent," self-selected reading portion of our school day. My multi-aged classroom

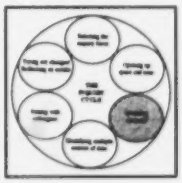
was already successfully engaged in its own version of Atwell's (1985, 1987) writing workshop. We were also enjoying whole-class shared reading experiences, organized thematically, with smaller groups reading self-selected extensions. It had not seemed necessary to look closely at independent reading time. In fact, I had reservations about what seemed to me an overemphasis on self-selection in Atwell's work. Although sometimes my students and I raised inquiry issues together, in this case the concern may have surfaced for me because there was an exceptionally wide range of interests, strengths, and needs among the students that year. Eight students were receiving support from the resource specialist. Several other bilingual students, although comfortable with conversational English, were still transitioning at the deeper literacy levels described by Krashen (1981) and Cummins (1981). I felt an extra pressure to be sure that every part of the curriculum was valuable for all students.

Taking Time to Observe and Reflect



I first spent some time simply observing students reading. Opening up time for observation and reflection at this point meant trusting that the inquiry was more valuable than direct instruction, than modeling myself as a reader (often expected of sustained silent reading programs), or even than the opportunity to read with and assess individual students. Although some noses were glued to books, a number of students were mostly shuffling books during the reading period, passing notes, wiggling beyond the norm, and for me the worst, "faking it." A number were reading books I considered less than interesting or challenging. I asked students to list their 10 favorites. Several could not remember 10 titles, let alone their favorites. It did not take me long to realize that my students did not believe self-selected reading was a valuable part of our curriculum.

Asking Students for Their Help

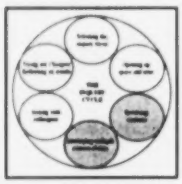


To get started, I shared with students the reasons for the inquiry and the importance of their involvement. Revisiting Atwell's (1987) ideas about reading workshop, I began a series of whole-class discussions in which we brainstormed ideas and opinions. Students considered: *What kinds of books do we like to read? What makes a good book, anyway? How do we choose books? Do we listen to our friends' advice? If so, which friends? Do we read the covers? Look at the pictures? Find favorite authors? How long do we decide to stay with a book that hasn't captured our interest?*

Student ideas were posted on charts that could be revisited and revised as the year went on. Discussions wove in and around the accumulating ideas about how to make reading choices. Ten-year-old Sarah explained that it was important for her to go past the first chapter before giving up on a book. She noted that sometimes authors were purposefully confusing in the

beginning to draw us into the story. One student remembered a "five finger rule." Younger children had been advised to hold a finger down for each unknown word. More than 5 per page might mean the book was too hard. Of course, we talked about longer texts and other factors affecting difficulty. We decided that we might not want to read a good book "before its time."

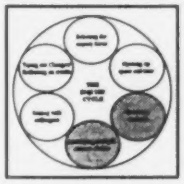
Setting Goals



Important discussions early in the effort involved setting goals for self-selected reading. Students talked about purposes for reading in general. They considered whether they believed that sheer quantity would increase reading fluency and/or overall academic success. I regularly shared research findings that I thought would be interesting to them (e.g., Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983).

Students' first goals related to quantity. Some estimated the number of pages they would read in a month; others, the number of books. Yet even this seemingly narrow focus led to rich discussion. *Was a fast reader better than a slow reader? Did reading books for a second time count? How did we compare the value of reading many easier books with reading one difficult book more slowly?* The questions reflected students' efforts to understand their own goals, values, and purposes for reading. They were not easy questions. I tried to make it clear that they might each have different answers.

One Student's Story



My commitment to trusting the process of individual goal setting was tested by a student who was new to the school and its values in terms of collaboration, learning, and assessment. He set his goal at 2000 pages for the first month, reporting his success with a list of books read. I could not know for sure whether he actually read the listed books, but that was not the point. He needed to understand this process was really about setting his own goals. I bit my tongue, for the time being.

For the second month, the student kept his 2000 page goal, but reported reading nothing! When we conferenced, I asked if he had perhaps set his goal too high. He replied, "Nope, I just like it that way. A lot of reading one month and nothing the next." Following a hunch, I risked probing his motives further. "Could it possibly be that you wanted to prove you could read more than anyone else in the class?" The boy's blue eyes twinkled, luckily not with the tears that might have been there earlier in the fall. Together we acknowledged that he did not enjoy reading nearly as much as "math and sports and other stuff," in spite of his clear ability to read challenging texts. I thought about his need to compete, his fear of taking risks, and other issues that I was beginning to understand had an effect on his learning. Together we began to adjust his goals to include books that were more fun than the ones he had chosen simply to impress others or his parents.

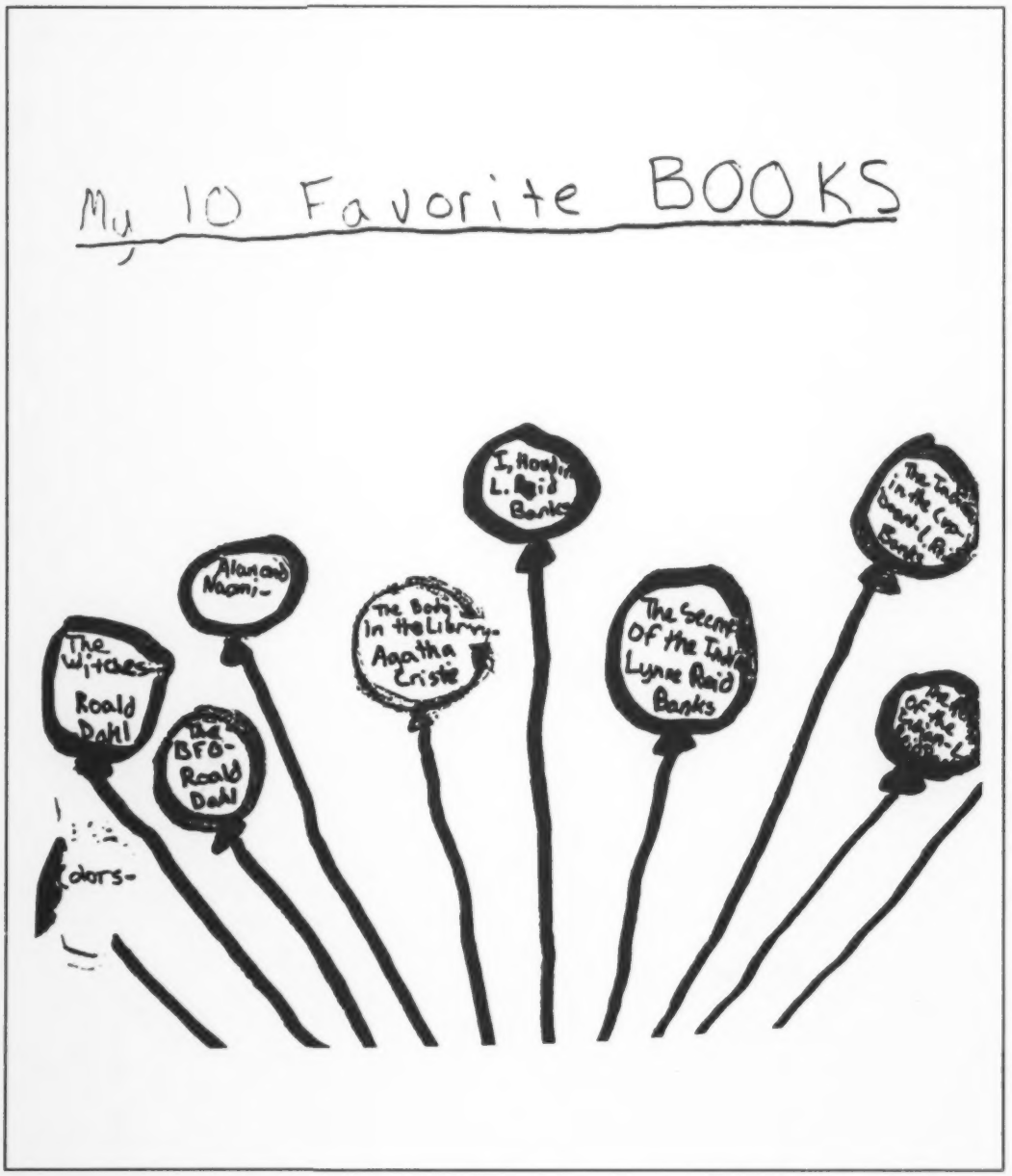
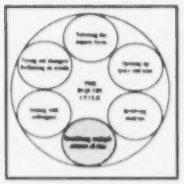

My 10 Favorite BOOKS
The Witches- Roald Dahl
The BFG- Roald Dahl
Alan and Naomi-
The Body In the Library- Agatha Cristie
The Secret Of the Ind Lynne Reid Banks

Figure 2. A new student

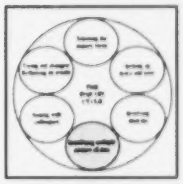
Importance of Taking Time



Nevertheless, he continued for the next 5 months with public comments about the lack of challenge in our shared books. "Why aren't we reading more difficult books like Edgar Allan Poe?" It was not until March and the creation of our new "top ten" lists that I saw concrete evidence that he was reading for his own purposes (see Figure 2).

His list included popular authors like Roald Dahl and Lynn Reid Banks. The naming of a class book of poems, *Colors*, was especially telling since his poem had also been a breakthrough for him in terms of authenticity of voice. He had been complimented by several visitors to the school for his work. The comparison between top ten lists earlier in the fall and later in the year was an important source of data for both the students and me.

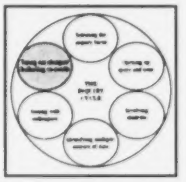
Ongoing Communications with Students



The interactive reading journals suggested originally by Atwell (1987) were another important source of data. Through the journals, with trust and time, I was able to learn more about the students' level of responsibility with regard to setting and articulating their own goals. Katie's journal entries illustrate this goal adjusting as well as other kinds of ownership (see Figures 3 and 4).

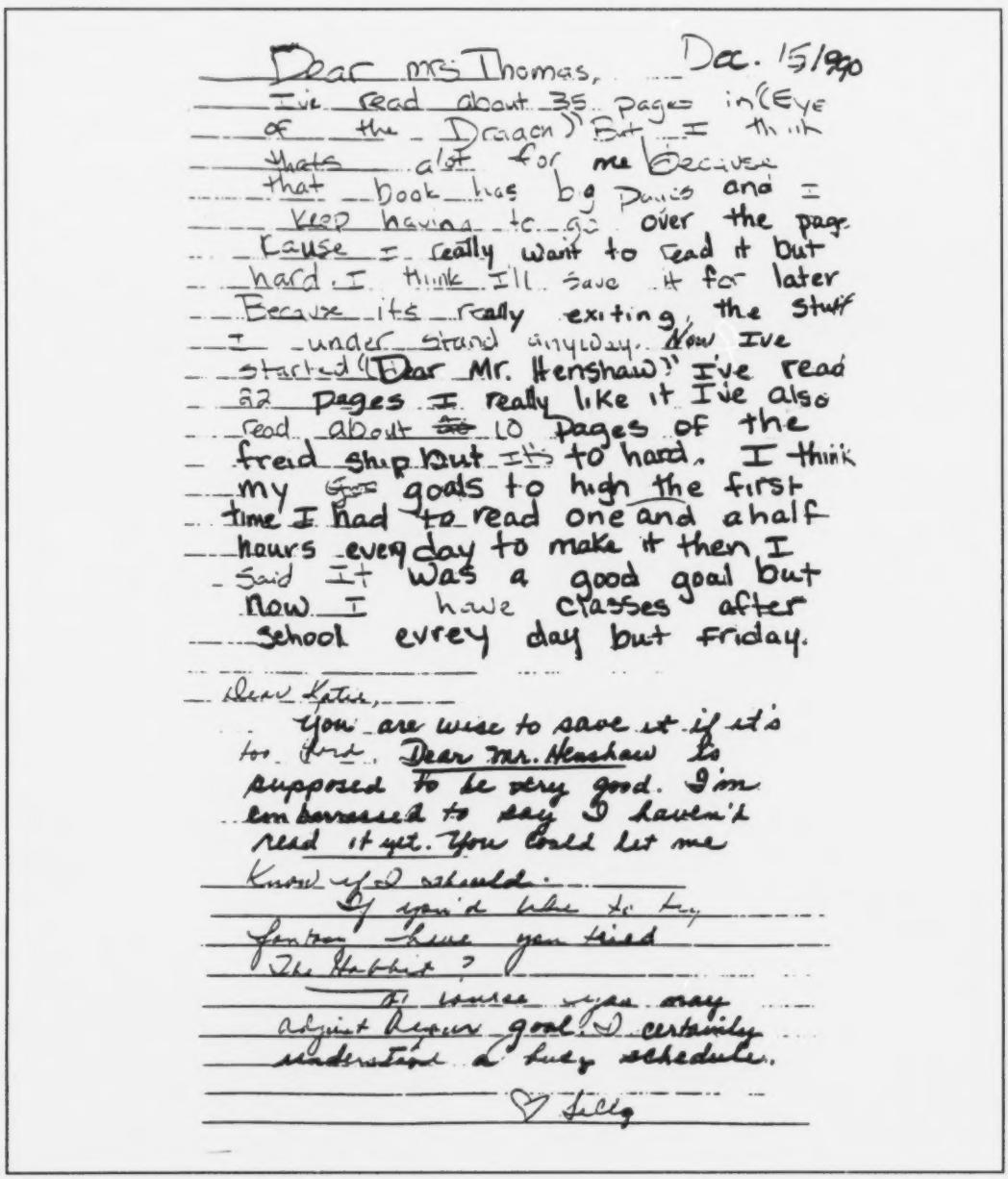
Katie's letters made clear to me that she had heard and applied our whole-class discussions about selecting books at appropriate reading levels. She was comfortable with the knowledge that she was not yet ready for a Stephen King novel; she had faith that more experience would allow her to enjoy the book later. Second, her decision to read only selected chapters in an information book was her own discovery, one that she was able to share with her classmates.

Extending Experiences with Literature



The students created their own unique genre list. They called it "The Kinds of Books We Like to Read." The list included both traditional categories, like poetry or historical fiction, and books grouped by topics related to thematic units such as survival or quest fantasy books. Series books like the *Sweet Valley Twins* and *The Babysitters Club* were quite popular with some students. Ray Bradbury, an author of such importance to the class that he was his own category, was Nicki's favorite author. She liked his *Dandelion Wine* best because "although it was science fiction, it involved 'real life problems.'"

After students articulated the kinds of books we were reading as a class, they went on to graph their own reading by month. This led naturally to new goals that extended the range of their reading experiences. Vanessa concluded, for example, "I would like to try a different type of book. More like fantasy. And I will read more to improve."



Dear Mrs Thomas, Dec. 15/90

Ive read about 35 pages in (Eye of the Dragon) But I think thats alot for me because that book has big pages and I keep having to go over the page cause I really want to read it but hard. I think Ill save it for later Because its really exiting, the stuff I understand anyway. Now Ive started (Dear Mr. Henshaw)" I've read 22 pages I really like it Ive also read about ~~so~~ 10 pages of the fread ship but It's to hard. I think my ~~Goa~~ goals to high the first time I had to read one and a half hours every day to make it then I said It was a good goal but now I have classes after school evrey day but friday.

Dear Katie,

You are wise to save it if it's too hard. Dear Mr. Henshaw is supposed to be very good. I'm embarrassed to say I haven't read it yet. You could let me know what you decide. If you'd like to try Sentry Dog you tried The Hatchet? I'm sorry you may adjust Reyes goal. I certainly understand a busy schedule.

♡ Sally

Figure 3. Katie

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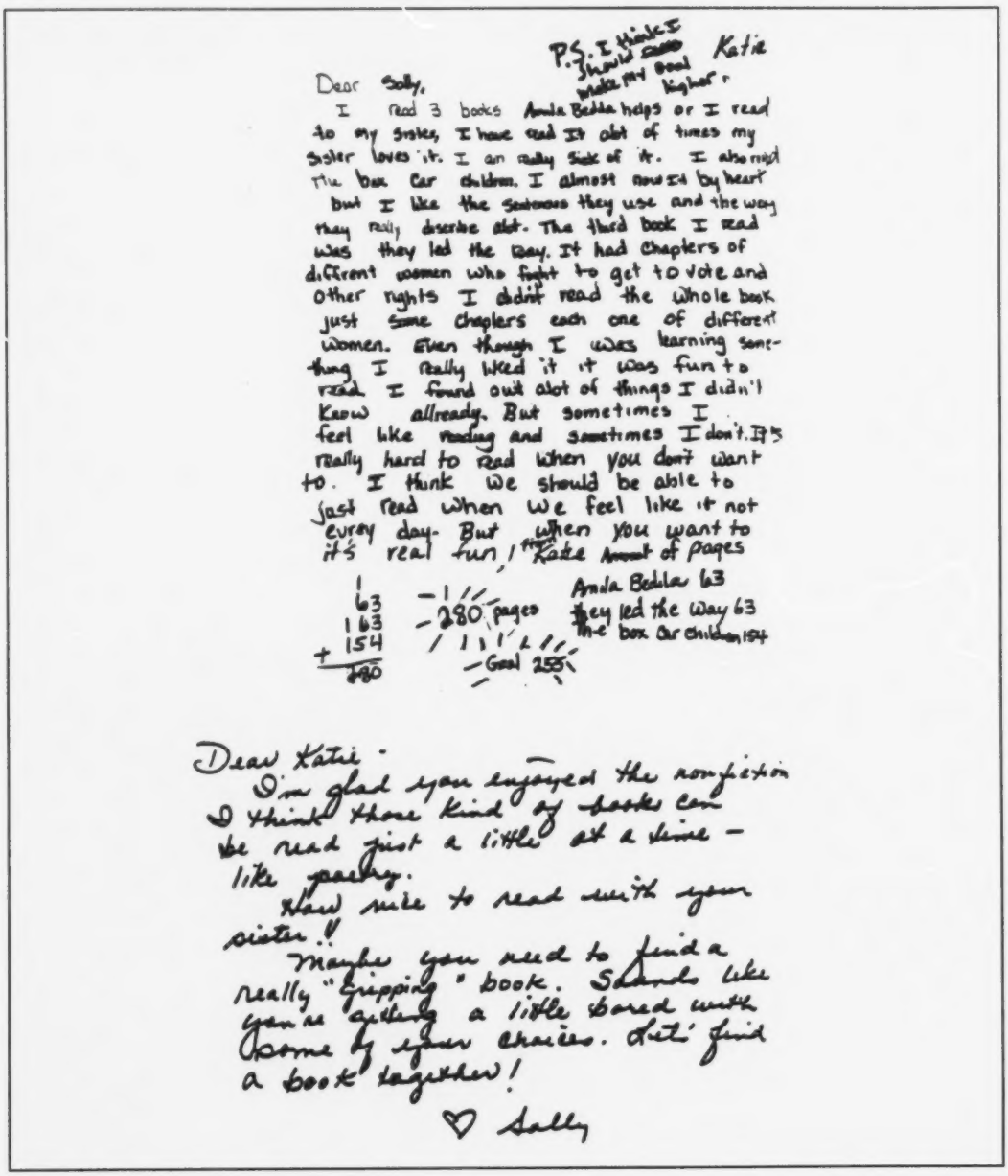

P.S. I think I should make my goal higher. Katie

Dear Sally,
I read 3 books Anda Bedla helps or I read to my sister, I have read it alot of times my sister loves it. I am really sick of it. I also read The box Car children. I almost now it by heart but I like the sentences they use and the way they really describe alot. The third book I read was they led the way. It had chapters of different women who fight to get to vote and other rights I didnt read the whole book just some chaplers each one of different women. Even though I was learning something I really liked it it was fun to read. I found out alot of things I didn't Know allready. But sometimes I feel like reading and sometimes I don't. It's really hard to read when you don't want to. I think we should be able to just read when we feel like it not every day. But when you want to it's real fun! Katie

Amount of pages
Anda Bedla 63
they led the Way 63
The box Car Children 154
Goal 255

Dear Katie:
I'm glad you enjoyed the nonfiction. I think those kind of books can be read just a little at a time - like poetry.
How nice to read with your sister!!
Maybe you need to find a really "gripping" book. Sounds like you're getting a little bored with some of your choices. Let's find a book together!
♡ Sally

Figure 4. Katie

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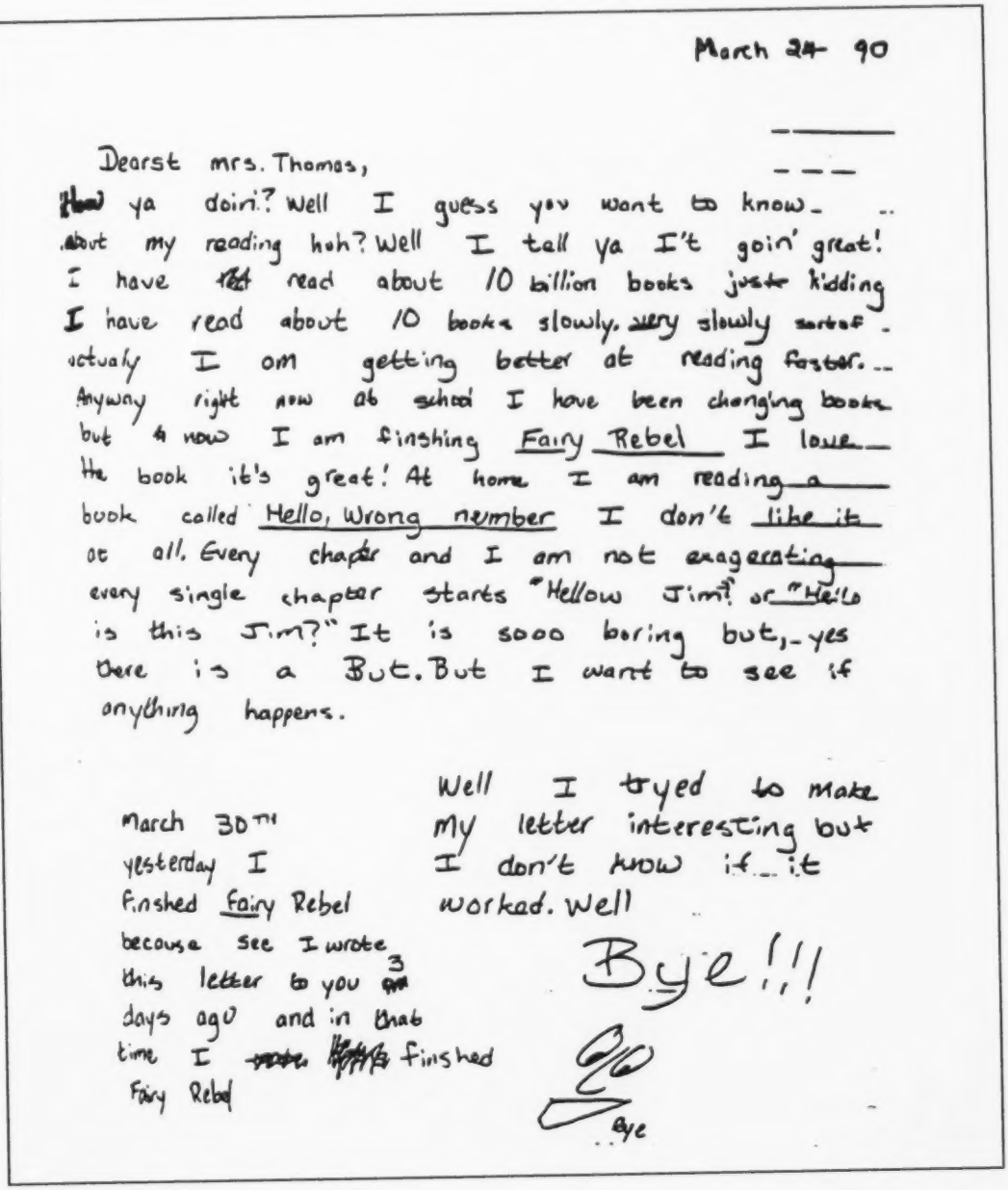

March 24 90

Dearst mrs. Thomas,

How ya doin'? Well I guess you want to know about my reading hah? Well I tell ya I't goin' great! I have ~~not~~ read about 10 billion books just kidding I have read about 10 books slowly. very slowly sortof. actualy I om getting better at reading faster. Anyway right now at school I have been changing books but 4 now I am finshing Fairy Rebel I love the book it's great! At home I am reading a book called Hello, Wrong number I don't like it at all. Every chapter and I am not exagerating every single chapter starts "Hellow Jim! or "Hello is this Jim?" It is sooo boring but, yes there is a But. But I want to see if anything happens.

March 30TH
yesterday I
Finshed Fairy Rebel
because see I wrote
this letter to you 3
days agO and in that
time I ~~read~~ finshed
Fairy Rebel

Well I tryed to make My letter interesting but I don't know if it worked. Well

Bye!!!

Eye

Figure 5. Rory

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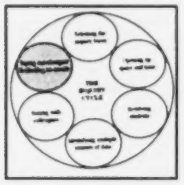
Emerging Patterns

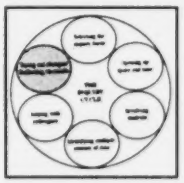


Specific insights about particular students always helped me support their individual learning. But the patterns that emerged for groups of students sometimes led to changes in my approaches for the whole class. Nicki's comments helped me see one such set of patterns. Her interests as a writer and a reader were closely connected. In a similar vein, Paul described *One-Eyed Cat* (Fox, 1984) as a favorite book "because of its good description." Paul, Nicki, and other students read like writers, looking for techniques they could use in their own writing. I realized how important reading was becoming to the students' development as writers. I had known this on a theoretical level before but had not fully integrated that knowledge into my practice. This understanding led to a greater blurring of the boundaries between readers' and writers' workshops. As Abigail pointed out, we might be reading in writing time or writing in reading time. I trusted students to meet their own needs in this regard.

Students continued to examine their purposes for reading and their criteria for quality books. For example, Rory said that *Ferret in the Bedroom, Lizard in the Fridge* (Wallace, 1987) was "not one of the ones that will stay in my heart. I know it was a quickie, but—oh, well." Omar felt that *Different Dragons* (Little, 1989) "sort of reached inside me." He recommended that I read it.

Comments like these highlighted another emerging pattern related to the possible importance of books that I had previously discounted. I realized that books I had previously looked down on as not being quality literature met the needs of readers in two different ways. Rory naturally alternated, as many mature readers do, between lighter, more predictable books and those of more substance (see Figure 5). Other students were more dependent on the highly predictable genre books to build their competence and fluency. I came to respect both uses more.

Reading Aloud



Brian wrote about his problems with listening to other students read (see Figure 6). I was comfortable with giving students purposeful opportunities to read aloud such as Readers Theater, choral reading, or simply sharing favorite passages. I consciously avoided whole-class round-robin reading, but found that students regularly pushed me for the opportunity to join in when the whole class was sharing a book. I wondered if their desire to read at such times was legitimate and if my stance was too rigid. Brian's reflection, however, helped me see a connection between visualizing a story and hearing story voices in one's head. I wondered if all students did both or whether they tended to use one more than the other. I knew that poorer readers often did not do either. I related this also to Rory's comment that she liked my reading aloud

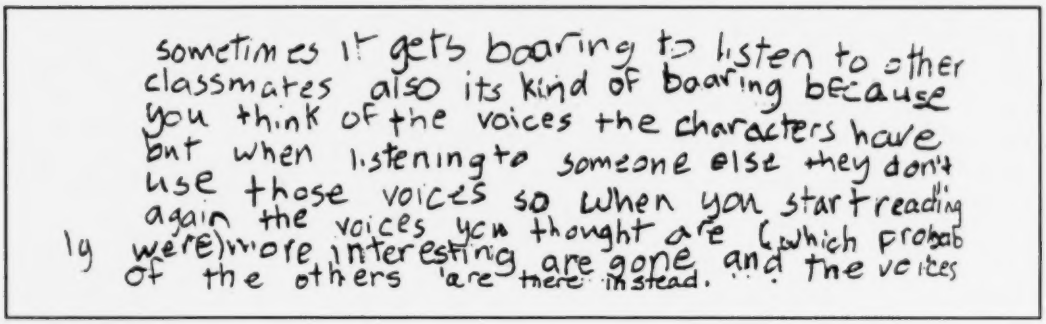
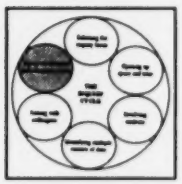

sometimes it gets boaring to listen to other classmates also its kind of boaring because you think of the voices the characters have but when listening to someone else they don't use those voices so when you start reading again the voices you thought are (which probab ly were) more interesting are gone and the voices of the others are there instead.

Figure 6. Brian

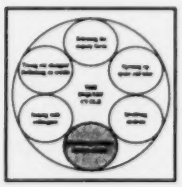
because my voice "put meaning in the words." All of this strengthened my conviction that, as much as students liked to participate as readers, as listeners it was important for them to hear a consistent, experienced voice. At the same time, I made sure to increase their opportunities for planned audience reading.

Rereading



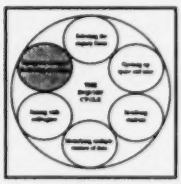
Nicki discovered the value of re-reading through our dialogue in the interactive reading journals, christened "chatty letters" by my ever inventive class (see Figures 7 and 8).

Raising New Issues for Inquiry

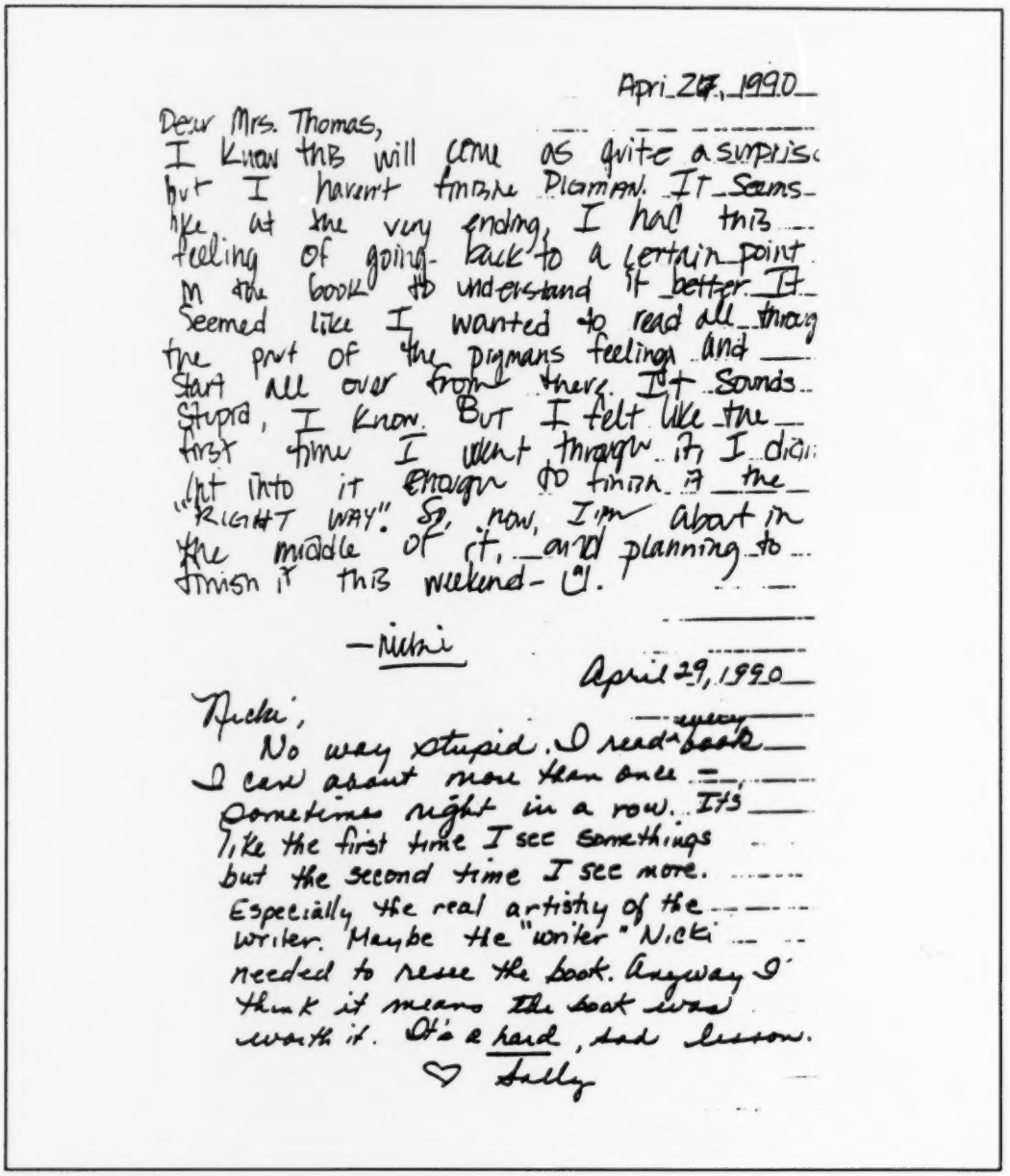


I had moved away from traditional book reports several years before and had recently experimented with creative projects or simply reading for pleasure

As part of the shared inquiry, I experimented with interactive reading journals (Atwell, 1987; Five, 1986) as a way to carry on literacy conversations with individual students. These chatty letters ranged from short to long and from funny to quite serious. But they were never boring. Students never avoided them or requested a break, unlike their reactions to literature/reading logs as seen in Nicki's letter (see Figure 8).



This finding was significant to me, since my students were used to speaking very forthrightly about what they liked or disliked. I concluded that this was because in both content and format the letters embodied a conversation in which the students and I more equally shared insights, questions, delights, and struggles. The students did not interpret the letters as assignments. I used this insight in turn to critique the ways I was using reading logs. Had reading logs become for the students



April 27, 1990

Dear Mrs. Thomas,
I know this will come as quite a surprise but I haven't finished Pigman. It seems like at the very ending, I had this feeling of going back to a certain point in the book to understand it better. It seemed like I wanted to read all through the part of the pigmans feelings and start all over from there. It sounds stupid, I know. But I felt like the first time I went through it I didn't put into it enough to finish it the "RIGHT WAY". So, now, I'm about in the middle of it, and planning to finish it this weekend - ☺.

-Nicki

April 29, 1990

Nicki,
No way stupid. I read a book I can about more than once sometimes eight in a row. It's like the first time I see somethings but the second time I see more. Especially the real artistry of the writer. Maybe the "writer" Nicki needed to rescue the book. Anyway I think it means the book was worth it. It's a hard, sad lesson.
♡ Sally

Figure 7. Nicki

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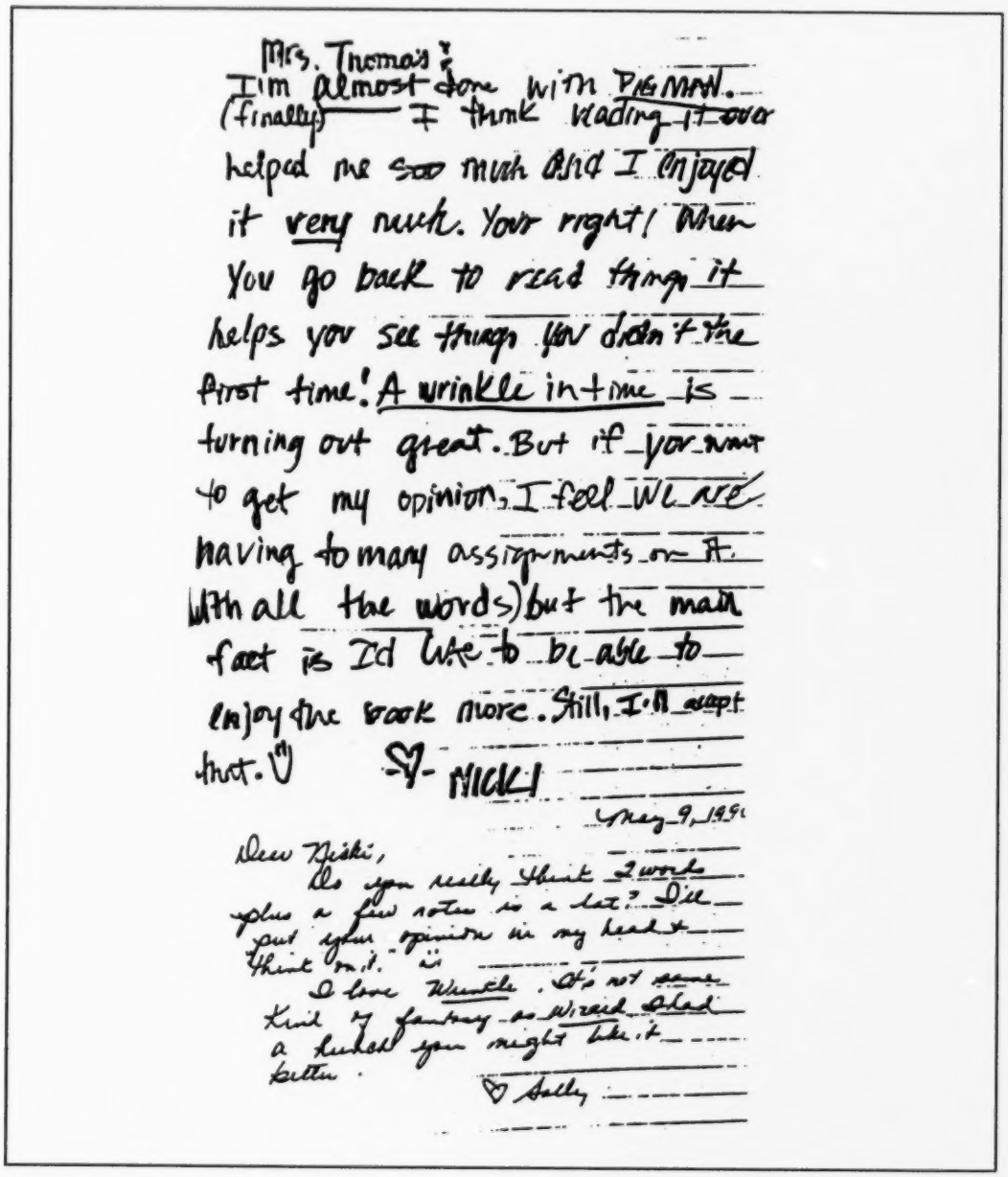

Mrs. Thomas:
I'm almost done with PIGMAN. (finally) I think reading it over helped me soo much and I enjoyed it very much. Your right! When you go back to read things it helps you see things you didn't the first time! A wrinkle in time is turning out great. But if you want to get my opinion, I feel we are having to many assignments on it. With all the words) but the main fact is I'd like to be able to enjoy the book more. Still, I'll accept that. ♡ -Y- NICKI

May 9, 199

Dear Nicki,
Do you really think 2 words plus a few notes is a lot? I'll put your opinion in my head & think on it. ☺
I love Wrinkle. It's not same kind of fantasy as Weird Blood a kind you might like it better.
♡ Sally

Figure 8. Nicki

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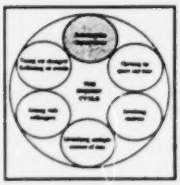
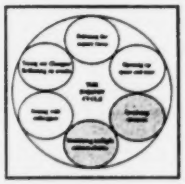
Nicki

just another form of questions at the end of the story? In this case, the students initiated an important issue for our next shared inquiry.



The students and I challenged ourselves to be sure the logs were being used purposefully—to support group discussions or later writing—not just to check up on reading.

Student Reflection: Focused Questions, Comparisons, Contrasts



In connection with both spring parent conferences and a presentation I was to make at The Claremont Reading Conference, I developed a questionnaire to help students reflect more explicitly on their experiences with both

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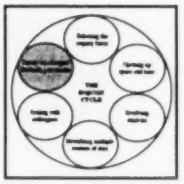
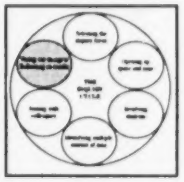
shared and self-selected reading (see Appendix). The students knew their responses had a number of important audiences: themselves, me, their parents, and other educators. Overall, the students indicated that they valued both self-selected and shared reading, but for different reasons. A number of students said that shared reading "broadened" their experiences. Paul acknowledged, "I usually wouldn't read what Mrs. Thomas picks." But he also said, "I really think we're reading very good books this year." Vanessa wrote that sometimes she did not like the shared books. "Maybe because I don't like the book and we go too slow (even though I read slow)." But she also wrote, "Most of the time I like what we've done with reading. It's better to have more people read together because more people have more ideas." Listening to her classmates, Vanessa commented that they "ask questions that make me notice or wonder things that I didn't [before]." Interestingly, Nicki indicated that a shared book experience, *One-Eyed Cat*, which she disliked intensely, was one of her most important learning experiences of the year.

Students valued looking together at the ways that an author used language, and many demonstrated a sophisticated sense and appreciation of reading for different purposes. After exploring as a class Ray Bradbury's poetic use of language, Isby wrote in her reflection, "I notice weird quotes more in my class reading. In my own [reading], I tend to get more involved."



Like the reading journals, the reflective evaluations provided evidence of students' motivation and achievement. They also demonstrated students' ability to think, talk, and write about that evidence. They helped us make decisions about plans for future learning, both individually and as a learning community.

Teacher Reflection



Although the evidence should have been clear throughout the chatty letters and in answers to the questions, it was not until I reflected upon the students' "Ten Favorite Books" after the year was over that I gained yet another important insight. I realized with chagrin that there were almost no choices reflecting a multicultural curriculum. I had certainly been making efforts to grow in this regard, but I could see that those efforts had not gone beyond Banks' (1989) *contributions* and *additive* levels of a multicultural pedagogy. I understood that I had probably not yet transformed my own values and passions. I clearly had much work to do. I doubt that that realization would have been possible without the concrete data I had collected. It provided powerful evidence which I could not overlook. I have regretted, since that was my last year in the classroom, that I was unable to share this new inquiry opportunity with the students.

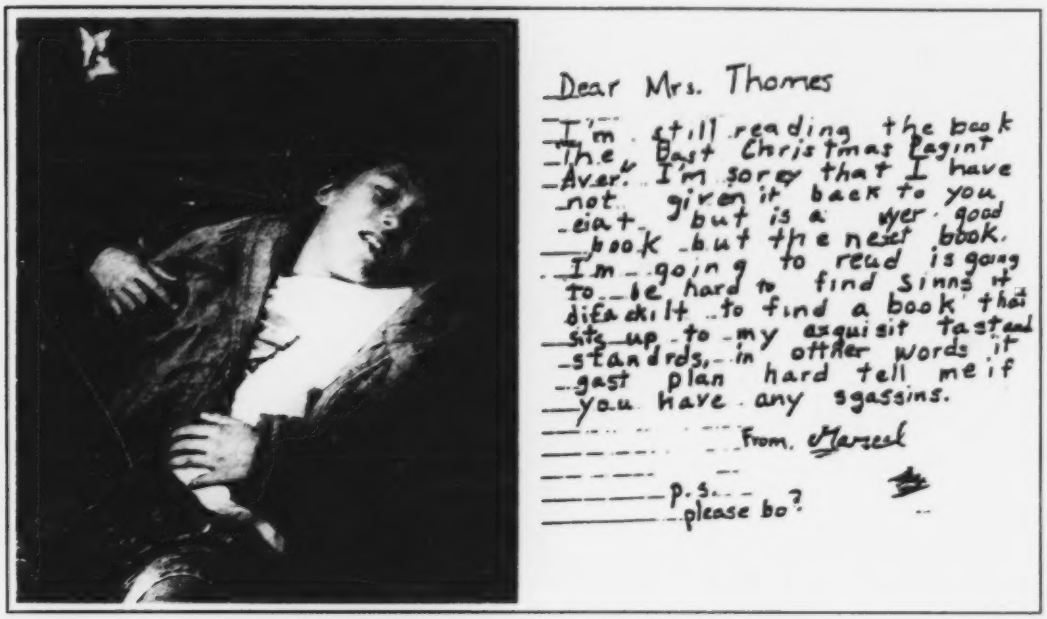
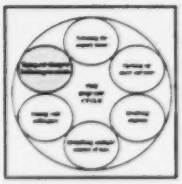

Dear Mrs. Thomes
I'm still reading the book
The last Christmas Eagint
Aver. I'm sorey that I have
not given it back to you
eiat but is a wyer good
book but the neset book.
Im going to read is going
to be hard to find Sinns it
difacult to find a book that
sits up to my exquisit tastand
standrds, in otther words it
gast plan hard tell me if
you have any sgassins.
From. Marcel
p.s.
please bo?

Figure 9. Marcel

Problems and Frustrations



Although we found solutions to many problems, both individual and whole-class, some were simply unresolvable. Often, results came months into the school year. A few children did not learn to love reading, although all but one became better readers in one way or another. Marcel had trouble finding books to read (see Figure 9).

Although he had "exquisite tastes and standards" and understood shared texts at a very sophisticated level, he had great difficulty with processing print. Together we searched for books interesting enough to compensate for his difficulty in reading. For example, he loved inventions and especially enjoyed texts combined with pictures as in Macaulay's (1988) book, *The Way Things Work*.

I never fully resolved my questions regarding Marcel's difficulty with processing print. Was it important to keep trying to build fluency or should we move straight to alternative strategies for accessing the amount of text he might need to process in the years ahead? I do know Marcel was at least reading with minimal pain and a maximum of enjoyment! Marcel's needs also led me to reconsider my own assumptions about what counted as quality read-

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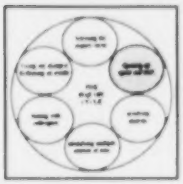
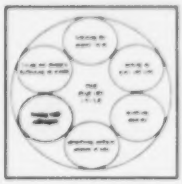
ing. I came to realize that my own bias toward fiction and poetry did not always allow for what students needed.



Patience and trust were important and not always easy. Finding time is always an issue for teachers and continued to be so for me. But the changes that we made enabled me to interact with and know students in personal and specific ways. This shift, in turn, helped me to let go of other time-consuming practices (e.g., responding to every piece of student work). Because students had more say about their learning, I had far less need for extrinsic controls, like the marks in my record book. Through the inquiry, students shared the responsibility for keeping track of their own learning. The time we spent was more often exhilarating than a burden.

Conclusions: Always Believe the Bird



There is a birdwatchers' proverb that advises, "When the bird and the book disagree, always believe the bird." This counsel is appropriate as we seek to share inquiry with students to discover the purposes they find meaningful in their own learning. We have wonderful professional books and other resources for our teaching. But in the end, we also need to trust and believe the students, for they are the experts, after all, about what makes sense to them, about what kinds and ways of learning are most interesting, relevant, and important (McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985; Oldfather, 1993a).

Sharing inquiry with students does not mean that we relinquish our roles as teachers. Nor does it mean that educational outcomes or curriculum expectations cannot be reached. As the students' interactive journals suggest, the purposes for literacy that emerge are likely to be ones that we all consider important. The critical difference is in terms of the intrinsic motivation that is activated when students participate with their teachers as educational theorists (Erickson & Shultz, 1992; Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993; Oldfather, 1995). As theorists, they help define purposes, set goals, and make choices within the given structures based on their own experiences, interests, and growing ability to reflect on their own learning.

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APPENDIX

Student Questionnaire for Shared Inquiry: Evaluating My Own Reading

Self-Selected Reading

1. Tell me about your self-selected reading so far this year. How do you feel about the quantity, quality, variety? Do you like choosing your own books? How do you choose them?
2. What was your favorite book so far? Why?
3. What was your least favorite book? Why? Did you finish it? If so, why?
4. What problems have you run into in your independent reading?
5. How do you feel about yourself as an independent reader?
6. How do you compare self-selected reading to the shared reading we do in class?
7. What are your goals for independent reading for the rest of the school year?

Shared or Whole-Class Reading

1. How do you feel about the reading we've done together so far this year? Think about quantity, quality, and variety.
2. What was your favorite book so far? Why?
3. What was your least favorite book? Why?
4. What reading problems have you had?
5. Look at your reading logs. What do they show about you as a reader? You might want to number examples in your log in bright ink and make comments about specific entries here.
6. How does listening to your classmates' ideas and interpretations help you as a reader?
7. How do you feel about yourself as a reader in a community of readers? What are your strengths? What would you like to improve?
8. What are your goals for the rest of the year as a member of our class reading community?

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